



The Spirit of Caring:

**A Volunteer
Education Resource**

Module 6: Understanding Suffering and Compassion

**Developed by:
Provincial Spiritual Health Care Management Network**

Module 6 – Session Guide

Understanding Suffering and Compassion

Facilitators Overview/Outline

TIME	ACTIVITY	RESOURCE	COMMENT
10min	Welcome participants/intro theme:	Use material marked “Introduction”	Engage the trainees in the initial sharing opportunity. Draw out the quiet ones.
30min	What do we know about the reality and meaning of suffering?	Questions for reflection (Page 2) Exercise - “What I think I know about suffering” (Appendix 1)	This is a further opportunity for each trainee to personally engage the subject
10 min	Religious and Philosophical approaches to suffering		
15 min	Break		
30 min	Compassion	Exercise - “What do I think about compassion” (Appendix 2) Reflection question (Page 4)	Seek to differentiate between compassion and sympathy
10 min	Suffering....compassion....connection.... empathy	“WOUNDS...HEALING... HEALTH STRENGTHS” (Appendix 3) Option – Use Video “Healing the Soul Pain” (see Appendix 4)	
5 min	How do you sustain yourself in the work you do?		
15 min	Compassion Fatigue	Role Play - Page 6	
10 min	Conclusion		

Understanding Suffering and Compassion

Karen Toole

Objectives

1. To understand the depth and reality of suffering.
2. To understand the reality and effect of compassion.
3. To establish the connection of spirituality and compassion in thought and action.

Introduction

Theme of this session: The deep of suffering and the reach of compassion.

“There are those who teach that suffering digs the well of compassion.”

What do you hear in that statement?

- Is it hopeful...
- challenging....
- fearful...
- depressing?

(sharing)

“The deep of suffering....enables the reach of compassion.....”

What do we know about the reality and meaning of suffering?

“We will all have pain, but we will not all suffer.”

“Suffering is the story we tell our pain.”

Ken Wilbur

Questions for reflection:

1. What is your story of suffering?
2. Behind the question of what is suffering, there is the much larger question of “Why do we suffer”? What has been your response to this?

Exercise: (Appendix 1)

1. Hand out sheet: "What I think I know about suffering?"
2. Share responses if participants are willing.

Religious and Philosophical approaches to suffering

Each religion/philosophy has its own story, its own teaching about the meaning of suffering. What do we know about these various stories?

Buddhist	Suffering is a curse, strive to have it end.
Christian	Suffering is a blessing, because God is in it.
Jewish	Suffering is opportunity for good works.
Existential	Suffering is meaning, and I can choose what meaning to give it.
Gnostic	Suffering is an illusion, spirit is the only reality.
Karma	Suffering is the result of negative karma. Past actions that were negative are being transformed into the positive by the suffering.
Magical thinking	Suffering is retribution. "I must deserve this because I once wished someone would die, if too many good things happen to me, something bad has to happen."
Scientific	Suffering is the result of specific causes. Some can be determined, others are random, due to chance. There is no meaning to suffering. It is about chance, or necessity.

The list could go on....

Suffering is the central problem of human existence. Suffering invites us and then compels us not to ignore or avoid it.

Personal reflection:

What do I believe about the reason for suffering and how it affects what I offer as spiritual care?

Compassion

Sharing of wisdom story:

Once there was a man who walked the earth with a bucket in one hand, and a torch in the other. When he was asked why he had the bucket, he would

respond, it is to quench the fires of hell. And when asked why he had the torch he would respond, it is to burn down the castles of heaven. And when asked why he would do these things, he would respond with the words, "Then we shall see who loves God."

What do you hear in the story that relates to what you offer those with whom you will visit? If the care is based in fear of punishment/pain or reward for righteousness are these the ways to bring compassion into the midst of suffering?

Exercise:

1. Hand out Sheet: "What I think I know about compassion?" (Appendix 2)
2. Share responses

The meaning of the word itself: "to come with passion"

Passion is not a soft word....filled with energy....

Where do we share our passion for life, our passion story?

Quotes on compassion:

"Compassion is the ability to change our minds and open our hearts"

*"Compassion is the quivering of the pure heart,
when we have allowed ourselves to be touched by pain."*

Jack Kornfield

The Buddha of Compassion is represented in Tibetan iconography as having
*"a thousand eyes that see the pain and suffering in all corners of the universe, and a
thousand arms to reach out to all corners of the universe."*

*"Compassion is the sometimes fatal capacity for feeling what it is like inside somebody
else's skin. It is the knowledge that there can never really be any peace and joy for me
until there is peace and joy finally for you too."*

Frederick Buechner

Story: Quoted in "How Can I help? - Ram Dass, Paul Gorman

I have friend, a chemotherapy nurse in a children's cancer ward, whose job it is to pry for any available vein in an often emaciated arm to give infusions of chemicals that sometimes last as long as twelve hours and which are often quite discomforting to the child. He is probably the greatest pain-giver the children

meet in their stay in the hospital. Because he has worked so much with his own pain, his heart is very open. He works with his responsibilities in the hospitals - a laying on of hands with love and acceptance. There is little in him that causes him to withdraw, that reinforces the painfulness of the experience for the children. He is a warm open space which encourages them to trust whatever they feel. And it is he whom the children most often ask for at the time they are dying. Although he is the main pain-giver, he is the main love-giver.

Preparation for care-giving requires us to work with our pain, our own suffering, and our own ability to open our hearts.

Reflection:

In what ways, through the course of your life, have you engaged the process of working through your own pain, your own suffering and your own ability to open up your heart?"

Suffering....compassion....connection....empathy

Goal of all this exploration of suffering and compassion is the recovery of the sacred:

Do we understand the links between these realities?

At essence this is the message of the wounded healer.

Dali Lama: Compassion....sympathy...empathy.... *"Empathy is the suffering of suffering and that is expressed in compassion."*

Why are we doing the work we do....

The easy answer is our faith, our "call", our commitment....

But dig deeper, behind that answer, and where does it begin for you experientially?

The Wounded Healer....a ground breaking book for ministry. Why?

Essentially Henri Nouwen said that we work out of our wounds....

This is how we learn to listen to soul pain

*"It's good to get to know you....and I really am liking to be in your world.
Music by Shawna Noll CD Lullaby for the Inner-Child"*

“Self” ...”soul” ...”psyche”are shaped by our experiences

Exercise:

1. Hand out sheet - “WOUNDS.....HEALING.....HEALING STRENGTH”
(Appendix 3)
2. Examples
WOUND – obesity.....
HEALING....being seen...
HEALING STRENGTH...Affirmation of difference...learning to not glance but
gaze
Or
WOUND....betrayal of trust....
HEALING....patient, persistent, deep listening....
HEALING STRENGTH....the very modeling of what healed me

How do you sustain yourself in the work you do?

What is your own spiritual practice?
How would you define soul pain?
How would you define soul healing?

Video Reflection – “Healing the Pain” (Appendix 4 - Information about this resource)

We are all about learning to listen to soul pain.
Sheet on what we need in order to be able to “touch” another person’s pain.
Suffering, Compassion and Recovery of the Sacred (Appendix 5)

Compassion Fatigue

Compassion fatigue comes from being caught up in the mind-body-spirit split. The secular and the sacred split, the giver and receiver split, the believer and non-believer split; we must do all of this personally before we share this in our role as care-givers, otherwise it lacks integrity, authenticity and runs the danger of causing further suffering rather than easing suffering.

“Our task is to recognize that we are always on sacred ground, that there is no split between the sacred and the secular. Life is a spiritual practice and health which serves life is a spiritual practice....dis-ease and suffering are spiritual paths as well.

The whole concept of “fixing” and “broken” suggests an insensitivity to the process nature of the world...the essential word of process is “yet”.

Rachael Naomi Remen

ROLE PLAY:

1. Choose someone to be the sufferer, someone to be the visitor.
2. Tell the one who suffers to stay with pain. Tell the one who visits to listen.

Discuss in group. Did it help, hinder or hold the line?

Conclusion

Imagine a bridge...on one side is trauma, loss, illness, pain, endurance...on the other side is mystery, meaning, hope, healing, wholeness....the bridge itself is called suffering.

What does it mean that we can walk that bridge, in relation to the work we are seeking to do together?

Here is the opportunity to build on the reality of the connection in suffering and compassion....this is not about patient and visitor but about all of us on the bridge together.

WHAT I THINK I KNOW ABOUT SUFFERING?

WHAT I THINK I KNOW ABOUT COMPASSION?

Appendix

WOUNDS I HAVE KNOWN (PAIN)	HEALING I HAVE DONE (TRANSFORMATION)	HEALING SKILLS I CAN CLAIM (COMPASSION)
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HEALING THE SOUL PAIN

Jane A. Simington, PHD

WHOLENESS- *"The only light worth following is the one that shine in your soul."* V. Blake

Picture of light shining through the darkness is a reminder of our ability to move from our world of darkness into light.

I would like for all of you to have a vision quest; to picture the advancement of your soul from darkness to light; a road map for your healing journey. Our desert and parched land can bloom with abundant flowers. We can sing joyfully again. Our pain can turn into gladness; sorrow and mourning can flee.

Visualize yourself as a bright shining circle of light and wholeness. From a sheet of golden paper cut a circle representing your completeness. It represents your talents, dreams, hopes, feelings, desires and your way of connecting to the Divine and to others. Try to remember when you felt most whole and complete.

If you are not able to see yourself in this way, think of a dandelion. It often grows in harsh conditions, such as a crack in cement. It flourishes against harsh odds. Yet it shines its brightness for the world to see. Later hundreds of seeds are riding in the wind. A reminder, we too have the strength and courage within us to overcome obstacles; we too can thrive in the face of great adversity, we too can bloom.

If you are willing to move past the trauma, the abuse, the torture had on your sense of wholeness, notice how your views of yourself have changed. Think about your thoughts about yourself, about others, the universe and the Divine. How much energy do you spend on a struggle with your feelings, protecting your wounded self?

Now from the white paper cut a circle the same size of the one of gold. Now cut a pie shape wedge, showing the impact the trauma had on your sense of wholeness. Color the wedge, describing the color choices, designs, symbols, which best describe your woundedness. Paste the wedge over the circle of wholeness. This is a starting point from where healing can begin.

To acknowledge the depth of our woundedness, we need to stop denying that we are hurting. By doing this exercise, we can see and we can touch this process. From here the search for healing tools begins, tools that will chip away the cover.

The healing reconnection is a reminder of the healing that is occurring. Stickers of trees, birds, flowers, music notes can be placed on the wedge symbolizing healing through nature, music or whatever else. The darkness is beginning to glitter through.

Unhealed wounds covered with a clay like covering have a way of refusing to stay dormant. The slightest bump and they break, and bleeding from the wound occurs. The healing must occur from inside out. The wound needs to be cleansed to the core.

Reexamine the wedge. My physical self, my emotional self, my spiritual self, my social world and the environment. When we experience trauma, every aspect of our being recoils in distress. We need to spend time and resources on healing all those dimensions.

If we can believe that the dark night came in the service of the light, than we can move through the transition, knowing that if we do the work necessary for the rebirth, we will see the sunlight awaken our soul in welcome of the returning spirit.

A Video Resource:

Dr Jane Simington is featured in a 30 min. video *Listening to Soul Pain* put out by Edmonton VON. I have used it a number of times and it is always well received. It is spiritually diverse, referencing cross cultural sources and is covers a number of issues...death of a child, post abortion grief, and so on. It is available from AVEL the United Church resource centre. We ordered it for the RHA library here in Brandon.

SUFFERING, COMPASSION AND RECOVERY OF THE SACRED